



DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EPISCOPAL CHURCH CENTER • 815 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

H. Boyd, Press Officer
New Dearnaley, Assistant Press Officer

Telephone: (212) 867-8400

80198

May 29, 1980

BISHOP HOBSON CELEBRATES 50 YEARS AS A BISHOP

by Lynn Goodwin Borgman, Editor

(Reprinted from Interchange by permission)

Decades before our obsession with CB's and trucking, he sped along the back roads of Ohio, amazing farmers as he pulled alongside their fences in his "Wayside Cathedral."

Anglicans called him "the baby" when, at the age of 39, he was the youngest bishop to ever attend a Lambeth conference in England.

His riveting gaze and booming voice raised \$1 million to pay off the national Church Depression debt in the 30's and again to raise up three campus parishes in the 40's.

After a dozen failures within the church, he established Forward Movement Publications, the first Episcopal publishing venture to last more than six years. After 46 years, FMP booklets are now read all over the world.

Henry Wise Hobson, fourth bishop of the Diocese of Southern Ohio, is a remarkable man for many reasons, not least of which is his anniversary of 50 years a bishop. No one knows for sure, but it must be a record.

"You have to start young and live long," he tells you with a twinkle of his legendary blue eyes.

Bishop Hobson celebrated this anniversary on May 1st in Christ Church Chapel, Cincinnati with his many friends among the clergy and the laity. Bishop Hobson credits his accomplishments to these people and his personal relationships with them.

Strong lay support from the diocese came early, even before his election in 1930. The laity, under the leadership of William Cooper Proctor of Ivory soap fame, gave him a majority on the first ballot of the election. By the fifth ballot, the clergy, needing the lay vote to elect, fell in line behind the tall stranger from Massachusetts.

-more-

It was a difficult time to be a bishop. Depression economics slowed pledge money to a trickle. The diocese was hardpressed to support its main program goals, not to mention the "second mile" of national church missionary work which was close to the new bishop's heart.

"I told the diocese at the first convention that we would never succeed here unless we were supporting the missionary work of the church.

"I told them I didn't want anyone presented to me for confirmation who wasn't willing to support both sides of the envelope. If a person wasn't ready to accept that responsibility, he wasn't ready to become a communicant of the church."

Bishop Hobson carried this message personally to his parishes. One particular episode even made its way into the pages of TIME magazine.

A certain parish had reallocated its missionary pledge to meet its own operating expenses. After no small confrontation with the bishop, the vestry reluctantly agreed to mend its ways.

The bishop drove the vestry treasurer to lunch and locked his car. The treasurer, anxious to make the diocesan feel at home, said, "You don't need to lock your car in our town. No one will touch it."

The bishop replied, "Believe me, in a town where people steal money from missionaries and spend it on themselves, I'd better lock it or I may have to walk home!"

Bishop Hobson traveled 4,000,000 miles during his twenty-nine years as an active bishop, many of them in his "Wayside Cathedral." After St. Paul's Cathedral in Cincinnati was torn down in 1938 because of its financial drain on the diocese, Bishop Hobson decided that there should still be a symbol of the bishop's residence.

"But the whole diocese was my home, so I went to Detroit and had them build the first solid-side aluminum trailer."

The forty foot "Church on Wheels" was fitted with a reversible altar and pews so that it could be used for both outdoor and indoor services.

"People laughed when we called that thing the cathedral so I did a little research and found out that (in the early days of the church) the Greek word cathedra meant the bishop's chair. Wherever they took that chair and put it down, that was the cathedral! It was a traveling symbol of the bishop's presence."

The "cathedral" served for fifteen years, housing small rural congregations which had no place to meet. People who could not come to the bishop were honored to have him come to them.

The "Old Barn Conferences," twenty-nine in all, were also tools the bishop used to keep the diocese together in body and spirit. Three hundred clergy and lay leaders met for four days in the Procter barn just south of London, Ohio to critique diocesan programs. At the end, participants felt their voices had been heard and the bishop had a consensus of opinion.

However, people thought Bishop Hobson was "way out of line" when he proposed a \$1 million College Building Fund drive in the Diamond Jubilee year of the diocese, 1949.

But, "by the following year, we had done it. We went ahead and built those three fine parishes in Columbus, Oxford and Athens. Since then, our college work has been very strong. It is so important to reach young people during their impressionable years."

Looking back to the days before his retirement in 1959, Bishop Hobson remembers these as his most important works.

But the enormous body of diocesan lore about his dramatic and "forward moving" episcopate suggests a more encompassing, perhaps incalculable, impact on the tradition and reputation of our diocese today.

On his 50th anniversary as a bishop, we salute Henry Wise Hobson with deep affection and appreciation.

#####

DP, DX

